

II. AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) Method for ensuring the availability of a service proposed by a service provider in a data transmission system including at least one user workstation connected to the Internet network, a plurality of content servers able to furnish services provided by service providers in response to service requests from said user workstation, and a proxy server interconnected between said Internet network and said content servers for receiving said service requests from said user workstation and transmitting each one to a content server able to provide the requested service;

said method including the following steps when said proxy server receives a service request,

looking in a context table for an entry corresponding to a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) defined in said service request in order to determine the content server able to provide the requested service,

appending a service availability request to said service request before sending said service request from said proxy server to said determined content server, the service availability request comprising a request for an availability of the determined content server,

appending a service availability token to the reply provided by said determined content server before sending said reply from said determined content server to said

proxy server, the service availability token containing at least a percentage of availability of the determined content server,

removing said service availability token from said reply upon reception thereof by said proxy server,

updating said context table in said proxy server before sending said reply to said user workstation by using information contained in said service availability token, and

sending said reply to said user workstation,

wherein the context table contains at least one entry comprising:

a server name comprising a hostname of a content server as contained in an URL;

an IP address of the content server;

one of the URLs associated with [a] the hostname of the content server;

an “availability” of the URL;

a last received date and time of a last received service availability token from the content server, wherein said last received service availability token contains a percentage of availability for the content server;

a request sent flag indicating whether [an] a service availability request has already been sent, wherein the request sent flag is reset every time a response is received;

a number of retries comprising a number of times a service availability request has been sent; and

a date and time of a last sent service availability request.

2. (Previously Presented) Method according to claim 1, wherein said context table includes a plurality of entries corresponding to several URLs associated with a same server name.
3. (Cancelled).
4. (Previously Presented) Method according to claim 2, wherein said service request is rejected if the parameter “availability” in said context table is defined as not available.
5. (Original) Method according to claim 4, wherein said context table includes multiple entries for the same server name, the entry with the parameter “availability” being the highest one selected in the step of looking for an entry.
6. (Previously Presented) Method according to claim 5, wherein said context table contains a plurality of parameters associated with said service availability request being sent which are updated when said service availability request is sent from said proxy server to said content server.
7. (Original) Method according to claim 6, further comprising the step of refreshing the entry of said context table by taking into account variables which are a function of parameters included in said context table.

8. (Original) Method according to claim 7, wherein the parameter “availability” of said context table is set to “not available” when said number of retries is equal to a predetermined maximum number.

9. (Original) Method according to claim 8, wherein said service request is written in HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and said service availability request is contained in a header of said HTTP service request.

10. (Original) Method according to claim 9, wherein said service availability token is in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format.

11. (Original) Method according to claim 10, wherein said context table is updated when receiving said service availability token from said content server, and the parameter “availability” is changed if necessary.

12. (Cancelled).